

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /084 W
-----018292 081644Z /23

R 081552Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8313
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LISBON
USNMR SHAPE
USMISSION USNATO
USCINCEUR
DIA WASHDC
USMISSION USUN
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
USMISSION USBERLIN
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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USDOCOSOUTH FOR INTA/

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS 1978: PITFALLS OF ELECTION ANALYSIS

AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

SUMMARY. LEST ANYONE CONCLUDE THAT THE FLURRY OF LAST-MINUTE POLLS HAS FINALLY CLARIFIED THE FRENCH POLITICAL SCENE, IT SHOULD BE REITERATED THAT THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS ARE NO MORE PREDICTABLE TODAY THAN THEY WERE A YEAR AGO. THE LIST OF UNCERTAINTIES BEGINS WITH THE POLLS THEMSELVES -- THE 14 PERCENT WHO REFUSE TO RESPOND, THE 19 PERCENT WHO SAY THEY COULD STILL CHANGE THEIR MINDS, THE UNEVEN RESULTS SHOWING A LEFT-RIGHT SPREAD RANGING FROM 52-44 TO 50-47 -- AND ENDS WITH SOME EVEN MORE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS:

- THE FIFTH REPUBLIC HAS NEVER SEEN THE LEFT AHEAD ON THE EVENING OF THE FIRST ROUND OF A NATIONAL CONTEST -- WHAT WILL BE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTION?;
- THE STRATEGY OF ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL ACTORS (PCF) REMAINS UNKNOWN, EVEN TO ITS OWN ELECTORS -- WHAT WILL THE STRATEGY BE AND HOW WILL THE ELECTORATE REACT?

THE FIRST ROUND ON MARCH 12 WILL LAUNCH THE PROCESS THROUGH WHICH THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE ANSWERED. EVEN SOONER, HOWEVER, IT MAY PRODUCE SOME EXCITING HEADLINE MATERIAL WHICH IN FACT MAY NOT BE AT ALL REVEALING, BUT WHICH WILL BE MANIPULATED TO MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE BY THE INTERESTED PARTIES. THIS TELEGRAM MAY HELP THE "INSTANT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ANALYST" IN AVOIDING A FEW OF THE MORE LIKELY PITFALLS. END SUMMARY.

1. WHAT THE POLLS DON'T TELL US: THE MAGIC OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY HAS BROUGHT POLITICAL FORECASTING INTO THE REALM OF NEAR-SCIENCE, SO THAT VOTING INTENTIONS CAN BE ANALYZED WITH REMARKABLE PRECISION. BUT WHILE FRENCH POLLING INSTITUTIONS ARE AS MODERN AND COMPETENT AS ANY, THERE REMAIN ENOUGH MAJOR UNCERTAINTIES IN THE POLITICAL EQUATION FOR MARCH 12 TO RELEGATE ANY PREDICTIVE EFFORT TO THE CATEGORY OF SUBJECTIVE SPECULATION. TO CITE ONLY A FEW:

- 14 PERCENT OF THOSE QUERIED IN RECENT POLLS REFUSED TO RESPOND. ARE THESE SIMPLY THE ANTI-POLLSTERS, CONFIRMED ABSTENTIONISTS, OR WARY VOTERS WHO COULD YET BE MOBILIZED? AS A GROUP, THEY SEEM TO TILT TOWARD THE MAJORITY (36 PERCENT HESITATE BETWEEN MAJORITY PARTIES, 22 PERCENT BETWEEN LEFT PARTIES, 35 PERCENT BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT). SHOULD THEY ALL VOTE, THE MAJORITY WOULD STAND TO GAIN ABOUT TWO PERCENT MORE THAN THE LEFT.

-- 19 PERCENT OF THOSE VOTERS WHO EXPRESSED A
PARTY PREFERENCE SAID THAT THEY STILL CONSI-
DER THEMSELVES OPEN TO FURTHER DISCUSSION AND
A POSSIBLE CHANGE OF HEART. THAT FIGURE IN-
CLUDES 20 PERCENT OF THE DECLARED PS VOTE AND
17 PERCENT OF BOTH PR AND RPR VOTING INTEN-
TIONS.
-- ONE OUT OF EVERY FOUR VOTERS, AND ESPECIALLY
THOSE SUPPORTING THE PS AND UDF, HAVE HAD
"MORE DIFFICULTY THAN NORMAL" IN MAKING THEIR
DECISION FOR 1978.

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
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INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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-- THE LATEST POLLED RESULTS VARIED FROM IF/OP/
LE POINT'S 52-44 SPREAD TO PUBLIMETRIE/
AURORE'S 50-47; SIMULATIONS FOR THE SECOND
ROUND INCLUDED VICTORIES FOR BOTH LEFT AND
RIGHT.

-- ABSTENTIONS ARE PROJECTED TO RUN AT ABOUT 17-
20 PERCENT, BUT NO ONE CAN IDENTIFY THE PARTIES MOST
AFFECTED. TO COMPLICATE THE MATTER, IT IS PROBABLE THAT
THOSE WHO WILL ABSTAIN WILL INCLUDE ONLY A FRACTION OF
THOSE VOTERS WHO CURRENTLY EXPRESS NO OPINION.

2. BEWARE THE STATISTICS: IN THE SAME WAY THAT POLLED
RESULTS CAN BE MISLEADING BEFORE THE ELECTIONS, THE MA-
NIPULATION OF ELECTORAL STATISTICS AFTER THE FIRST
ROUND MAY ALSO PRODUCE SOME INTERESTING HEADLINE MATE-
RIAL. EMBOFF TALKS MARCH 7 WITH EXPERTS FROM SO/RES,
IFOP AND LOUIS-HARRIS PRODUCED SOME POSSIBLE (MIS)LEAD-
ING STORIES, SUCH AS:

-- "PS GETS ONLY 25 PERCENT". SUCH AN OUTCOME
IS IN FACT EXPECTED (25-26 PERCENT), BUT IT
MAY BE HEADLINE NEWS FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO
MINIMIZE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE
LEFT SCORE -- PS STRENGTH IN THE MINDS OF MANY
FRENCHMEN STILL REMAINS AT 30 PERCENT OR MORE,
BASED ON MONTHS OF POLLS WHEN THE ECOLOGY VOTE
WAS NEVER BROKEN OUT AND WHEN THE LEFT RADI-
CAL (MRG) VOTE (2-3 PERCENT) WAS USUALLY
LUMPED IN WITH THAT OF THE SOCIALISTS. MITTER-
RAND'S ANNOUNCED GOAL OF SEVEN

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MILLION VOTES WOULD REPRESENT ONLY 24-25 PER-
CENT.

-- MANIPULATION OF POLITICAL LABELS: THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS SHOWED THE WILLINGNESS OF INTERIOR MINISTRY STATISTICIANS TO JUGGLE THE MULTITUDE OF POLITICAL LABELS IN ORDER TO REBALANCE THE PERCEIVED OUTCOME. THE SAME SITUATION ALREADY EXISTS FOR MARCH 12 -- THE INTERIOR MINISTRY, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS REFUSED TO SAY IN ADVANCE HOW IT WILL TREAT THE RESULTS OF SOME 80 PR, CDS AND RADICAL CANDIDATES WHO ARE NOT UDF-SPONSORED AND SOME OF WHOM ARE IN FACT COMPETING AGAINST UDF CANDIDATES. WILL SUCH CANDIDATES END UP AS "OTHER MAJORITY", "OTHER CENTER" OR AS UDF? THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STAKES IN SUCH MANIPULATION CAN BE HIGH, ESPECIALLY IN ORDER TO REVERSE THE RELATIVE STANDING OF THE PCF AND THE UDF ON THE FIRST ROUND.

3. HANDLE WITH CARE: IF UNCERTAINTIES ABOUND FOR THE FIRST ROUND AND ITS IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH, SECOND-ROUND PREDICTIONS MUST BE CONSIDERED EVEN MORE SPECULATIVE. AS RESPECTED POLITICAL ANALYST ALAIN DUHAMEL TOLD EMBOFF MARCH 7, THERE IS NO WAY TO PREDICT FRENCH REACTION FOLLOWING THE APPEARANCE OF A LEFT MAJORITY ON THE FIRST ROUND, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A NATIONAL CONTEST DURING THE FIFTH REPUBLIC. COMMUNIST STRATEGY REPRESENTS A SECOND GREAT UNKNOWN, SO THAT EVEN THE MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE OF POLITICAL OBSERVERS RECOGNIZE THE PROHIBITIVE UNCERTAINTIES WHICH RENDER EVEN THE BEST SCIENTIFIC SIMULATIONS A GREAT DEAL MORE HYPOTHETICAL THAN MODERN METHODOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY WOULD NORMALLY WARRANT. THE ONLY SOUND ADVICE FOR DEALING WITH FIRST-ROUND RESULTS AND SECOND-ROUND SIMULATION IS "HANDLE WITH CARE."
HARTMAN

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Message Attributes

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